



DEL & ESTELLE

SERIALIZED

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NEPHEW MEL

Del checked the sun. Café Roma would soon fill with lunchtime eaters. On this sunny day, people would dine outside and flick sandwich corners or the end of a French fry to any pigeon standing on the sidewalk. Del was watching a waiter set one of the outside tables when a cream-colored pigeon landed on a nearby newspaper rack.

“Yahooo! It’s Mel!” he said. “Good to see yooou again nephewwww.”

The new pigeon fluttered his dappled wings and rose onto Del’s streetlight.

“What’re yooou in the mood for tooday, Mel?” Del asked. “The one thing that beats noon snacks is the opportuuunity to give my nepheew a pigeon eduuucation!”

From the opposite street corner, Estelle watched Del and his nephew.

“Oh, bother, Mel’s here,” she said. “The only thing that would keep Del from lunch handouts is the chance to show off to his kin.”

Estelle watched Del and Mel fly off the streetlight. Flapping their wings loud enough to be heard over the traffic, they circled the intersection.

“Coo-a roo! What Del calls a pigeon education is really teaching Mel pigeon pranks. Each time those birds of a feather get together, more pigeon prevention spikes appear on the ledges in the neighborhood. Coo-a-roo! What mischief will Del and Mel get into today?”

Del, with Mel following, continued to loop around the four corners of College

and Ashby.

“Yooohooo, Estelle!” Del called as he passed her streetlight. “Enjoy your uuuusual boring day. Woohooo! I’m off to give my nepheew some pigeon schoooling. Birds of a feather—coo!—gooof around tooogether.”

The pair tore up College Avenue. Ten minutes later, they arrived at Elmwood Elementary School. Lunch recess was in progress, and the two pigeons perched on the chain-linked fence surrounding the playground.

“First lesson for tooday, nepheew,” said Del. “Pigeons have a repuuation among grownup huumans. They vieew us as hardy urban survivors whooo go where we want and do what we will. It’s our duuuty tooo live up tooo this huuman vieew of us. Watch this.”

With a single flap of his wings, Del glided onto the playground. He landed near the swings. At once, two kindergartners charged after him.

“Coo! Coo! Can’t catch me! Can’t catch me!” Del said, running the other way.

Soon three first-graders joined the chase, screaming and waving their arms. When one of them was about to catch the pigeon, he flew toward the slide and the chase began again.

“Coo! Coo! Catch me! Catch me!”

The duty teacher frowned and blew her whistle.

“Settle down, children,” she called out. “Shoo, bird! Shoo! Shoo!”

With the students still screaming, Del flew back to Mel on the fence. “Woohoo!” he said. “And that’s how yooou get the respect of a teacher, nepheew. Ready for more eduuucation?”

Meanwhile, back at the intersection at College and Ashby, Estelle was enjoying a quiet

afternoon. Below her, she spotted a woman standing at the bank’s ATM. A baby, strapped onto the woman’s back, was smiling at the sun.

“Pigeons have such a poor reputation among big people,” Estelle said to herself. “They think of us as city pests. Pigeon-toes, pigeon-hearted, stool pigeon—what insulting expressions they have that use our good name. I must do my part to improve people’s attitude toward us.”

She swooped down and landed on the sidewalk behind the woman.

“Coo-coo-rooo!” she called to the baby.

The baby babbled some words to the bird.

“Coo-coo-rooo!” Estelle repeated.

The woman turned. "Pi...geon," she said to her infant. "Pi...geon."

"Coo-coo-rooo! Coo-coo-rooo!" went Estelle.

The baby giggled and clapped his hands.

Flapping her checkered wings, Estelle rose straight into the air.

"Pigeon," the woman repeated, and the baby kept smiling.

While this was going on, Del and Mel landed on a power line directly above a row of parked cars.

"Woohoo! Here's lesson number twooo, nepheew," he said. "It's called Scoot Pooing. Pigeons around the world are known for this." He raised his tail feathers and bent forward. "Guano!"

A white glob dropped onto the windshield of the first parked car. Del scooted down the wire a few yards and raised his tail again. "Guano!"

More white gunk smacked a second windshield. With Mel following, Del slid down the power line and fouled a third and fourth car as well. One after another, he whitewashed windshields until he came to the last car in the row. A bald man sat in the driver's seat.

"Hoohoo! Come join me, Mel," he said. "Birds of a feather poop toogether. Guano!"

When the white blobs landed on the windshield, the man leaned out the window and shook a finger at Del.

"Filthy birds!" he shouted. "Flying rats! "

"Woohoo! Six cars in under a minute, nephewww!" Del said. "A neeew pigeon record."

Not far from the power line, Estelle landed in a vegetable garden behind a small brown house. An old man wearing a straw hat was tying tomato plants to bamboo stakes.

"Howdy, bird," he called out to Estelle.

"Coo-coo-roo!" went Estelle.

Raising her tail feathers, she left a spot of white by a carrot plant.

The man pushed back his hat with a thumb.

"Well, now," he said. "That will make fine fertilizer for my vegetables."

Estelle stuck her beak in a puddle of water. She took a long drink, proud of the fact that a pigeon is one of the few birds that can suck up water by using their beaks like straws. Then she strutted to a clump of crab grass at the edge of the yard. The weed had gone to seed, and she pecked at a seedy stalk.

"Eat all the seeds that you want, bird," said the man. "That'll save me some work when it's time for weeding."

"Coo-coo-roo!" said Estelle. "Pigeons in a yard are good value."

At that moment, a dog began barking next door.

"For crying out loud," said the man. "What's started that hound howling?"

In the neighboring yard, a German shepherd, leashed to the porch, continued to bark. At the same time, he leaped upward trying to catch two pigeons, Del and Mel, who were fluttering around his head.

"Yahooo! Nice, poochie!" shouted Del. "This barking will rattle the whole neighborhood, Mel. Yahooo!"

As Del spoke, a blast of water struck his side. Looking toward the porch, he glimpsed a woman aiming a water hose at him.

"Go away, pesky pigeons," she shouted.

"Leave Buster alone!"

With his feathers soaked, Del fell to the grass. The hose continued to douse him until he managed to fan his wings hard enough to fly away from the woman and barking dog. Mel took off in the opposite direction.

A short time later, Estelle stood on her streetlight at the intersection of Ashby and College. Looking up, she spotted Del fly onto his streetlight. She noted his wet and mussed feathers.

"What trouble have you gotten into, Del?" she asked herself. "Coo-a-roo! From the looks of you, the status of pigeons in this neighborhood took another dive."

